

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAMUA 2379

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, YE, SA, LY

SUBJ: STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN TA'IZ

1. SUMMARY. STUDENT CLASHES IN TAIZ BETWEEN ARAB NATIONALIST AND MUSLIM BRETHREN STUDENTS INJURE FORTY. LIBYANS AND SAUDIS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN STIMULATING TWO SIDES, FEEDING ON LOCAL RIVALRIES. TROUBLES HIGHLIGHT GROWTH OF BRETHREN DUE TO SOCIAL STRAINS OF RAPIDMODERNIZATION AND SAG POLICY OF USING BRETHREN TO OPPOSE LEFTISTS. BRETHREN, HOWEVER, HAVE LITTLE NATURAL APPEAL TO FLEXIBLE YEMENI MENTALITY.

2. ON MORNING OF NOVEMBER 18 WIDE-SCALE CLASHES ERUPTED IN TAIZ HIGH SCHOOLS BETWEEN ARAB NATIONALIST ("NASIRIST") AND MUSLIM BRETHREN STUDENTS. ALTHOUGH RUMORS OF FATALITIES ARE UNCONFIRMED, CLASHES WERE SERIOUS ENOUGH TO REQUIRE HOSPITAL TREATMENT FOR ABOUT FORTY PERSONS. FIGHTING STUDENTS WERE DISPERSED BY LOCAL SECURITY FORCES, AFTER WHICH LARGE GROUP OF STUDENTS MARCHED ON ARWA GIRLS SCHOOL TO EVICT GIRLS
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AND CLOSE SCHOOLS. THESE STUDENTS WERE DISPERSED BY TROOPS

OF MILITARY AREA COMMANDER.

3. TAIZ EMBOFF REPORTS TENSIONS STILL QUITE HIGH IN CITY WITH POSSIBILITY FUTURE DEMONSTRATIONS. EMBOFF NOTES TWO CONVERGENT REASONS FOR DISTURBANCES. ONE IS RECENT ACTIVITY OF LIBYANS WHO HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTING LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY TO LOCAL NASIRISTS. LIBYANS APPARENTLY TRYING TO EXPLOIT SHAFAT-ZAYDI SECTORIANISM (AS EGYPTIANS DID IN 1960'S) BELIEVING THAT ZAYDI-DOMINATED HAMDI REGIME IS PRO-SAUDI. BOTH ZAYDIS AND CONSERVATIVE SHAFATIS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY ALARMED AT LIBYAN-NASIRIST INROADS AND APPEAR TO HAVE RESPONDED THROUGH USE OF BRETHREN.

4. SECOND REASON IS LOCAL. POLITICAL INFIGHTING IN TAIZ HAS BEEN RATHER VICIOUS RECENTLY AS OPPONENTS IN SANAA SEEM TO BE USING TAIZ AS LONG-DISTANCE POLITICAL BATTLEFIELD IN ORDER TO AVOID FACT-TO-FACE CLASHES. GOVERNOR UTHMAN WHO IS INEXPERIENCED AND NOT TOO ADEPT POLITICALLY HAS PUBLICLY SHOWN SYMPATHY TO ARAB NATIONALISTS AND HAS BOTH DERIDED BRETHREN AND RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES AND ANTAGONIZED LARGE GROUPS OF SHAIKHS WHO ARE SYMPATHETIC TO BRETHREN ELEMENTS. PURPOSE OF DEMONSTRATION APPARENTLY WAS TO SHOW GOVERNOR THAT HE DOES

NOT HAVE FULL CONTROL OVER OWN PROVINCE AND TO ENHANCE REPUTATION OF MILITARY COMMANDER AND SECURITY HEAD WHO ARE POLITICAL OPPONENTS OF GOVERNOR.

5. IRONICALLY MUSLIM BRETHREN DEMONSTRATION TOOK PLACE IN TAIZ, MOST LIBERAL CITY IN YEMEN. WITH GROWTH OF CITY IN RECENT YEARS, HOWEVER, THERE ARE MANY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS FROM FAR MORE CONSERVATIVE COUNTRY. WHILE THERE IS NO

EVIDENCE THAT BRETHREN HAVE ATTAINED ANY REAL POLITICAL POWER (FLEXIBLY-MINDED YEMENIS, ESPECIALLY IN CITIES, GENERALLY LOOK ON SUCH RIGID "SLOPED FOREHEAD" MENTALITY WITH CONSIDERABLE DISDAIN), THERE HAS BEEN A STEADY GROWTH IN THEIR ACTIVITY IN THE LAST THREE TO FOUR YEARS. THIS IS, I BELIEVE, THE RESULT OF TWO DIVERGING TRENDS. ONE HAS BEEN THE MUCH MORE RAPID PACE OF DEVELOPMENT IN PAST FEW YEARS ALONG WITH GROWTH OF MAJOR CITIES, FACTORS WHICH ARE BEGINNING TO

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BRING FIRST REAL MODERN SOCIAL CHANGE WITH CONCOMITANT STRAINS. EXTREME CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS HAVE REACTED TO THIS CHANGE ZENOPHOBICALLY. SECOND FACT HAS BEEN GROWING SAUDI POLITICAL PRESENCE.

THERE IS AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT SAG IS DELIBERATELY STIMULATING MUSLIM BRETHREN ACTIVITY AS COUNTER TO LEFTIST APPEAL AMONG URBAN, ESPECIALLY STUDENT, ELEMENTS. RECENTLY, FOR EXAMPLE PEOPLE HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR IN BAZAARS TRYING TO FORCE

PEOPLE TO PRAYERS AND ANTI-FOREIGN EDITORIALS HAVE APPEARED
IN A MINOR SAG-SUPPORTED WEEKLY PAPER. SAUDIS HAVE OPENED

CULTURAL CENTER IN SANAA RECENTLY WHICH AS BEEN SUPPORTING
LOCAL BRETHREN-DOMINATED "LEARNING SOCIETY" (JAM'IYA 'ILMIYA).

6. MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT DR. IRYANI, A PRAGMATIC
PRO-WESTERN MODERATE, COMMENTED TO ME NOVEMBER 20 THAT,
WHILE BRETHREN MIGHT CAUSE PROBLEMS, THEY HAD LITTLE

CHANCE OF REAL POWER BECAUSE THEIR "KNOWNOTHINGISM" HAD
LITTLE APPEAL FOR YEMENIS. HE NOTED THAT SAUDI ISLAMIC CULTURAL
CENTER IN SANAA WAS ALMOST TOTALLY INACTIVE SINCE NO ONE WAS
WILLING TO GO THERE (FACT I CAN ATTEST TO SINCE CENTER
ADJOINS MY HOUSE). HE REGRETTEED THAT SUCH A DIVISIVE
ELEMENTS HOULD BE ENCOURAGED BY ANOTHER COUNTRY. HE HIMSELF
HAD TWO NEPHEWS IN TAIZ SCHOOLS WHO WERE BEING CONSTNATLY
INTERROGATED BY BRETHREN STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
AND PRACTICES. HE COMMENTED THAT NEPHEWS WHO WERE ORIGINALLY
MODERATE MUSLIMS WERE NOW BECOMING ANTI-RELIGIOUS AS A RESULT.
HE EXPRESSED BELIEF THAT WHILE ARAB NATIONALISTS MIGHT HAVE
LED ONE SIDE OF DEMONSTRATIONS, LARGE MAJORITY OF PARTICIPANTS
WERE MOTIVATED ONLY BY DESIRE TO VENT THEIR DISLIKE OF BRETHREN.
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